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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 BOGOTA 004961

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PTER CO FARC

SUBJECT: IDPS REPORT COLOMBIAN NGO COLLABORATING WITH THE FARC

REF: A. BOGOTA 2156

1B. BOGOTA 3361

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

Summary

1. (C) On May 12-13, Human Rights Officer, Assistant Army Attache and British Embassy representative traveled to the highly conflictive Uraba region of northwestern Colombia. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) and business leaders reported that Justicia y Paz, a Colombian NGO working with communities in the region, allows the FARC to transit the communities freely, controls access to the communities, and misuses international funding donated to benefit IDPs and vulnerable populations in the area. Regarding the February massacre of eight individuals, including three members of the peace community of San Jose de Apartado, 17th Brigade Commander said soldiers captured four members of the 5th Front of the FARC, who reportedly have information on the massacre, on May 8. Additionally, a minor, also a member of the FARC's 5th Front, recently turned himself into the Colombian National Police and provided the Fiscalia with information on the March 2 grenade attack against the investigative commission. Police Lieutenant Colonel Clavijo told Emboffs that the number of families in San Jose de Apartado has grown from two when the police arrived on April 2 to 45 as of May 12, with more continuing to return. End summary.

Uraba Region of Colombia

2. (S) On May 12-13, Human Rights Officer, Assistant Army Attache and British Embassy representative visited Turbo, Carepa and Cacarica in the Uraba region of northwestern Colombia. Emboffs traveled with Johanna Cabeza (strictly protect), director of the Bogota-based NGO Return Foundation ("Fundacion Retorno"). The Fundacion Retorno is assisting with several voluntary returns of individuals who were displaced from the Cacarica region in 1997 as a result of fighting between the 17th Brigade and the 57th Front of the FARC during "Operation Genesis." Sporadic returns began in 1999, when the collective land title was given by the State to the entire Cacarica Afro-Colombian community, in accordance with Law 70 of 1993. Many individuals who returned at this time accepted the assistance of local NGO Inter-Church Commission for Justice and Peace ("Justicia y Paz"). However, Justicia y Paz conditioned its assistance to residents based on the requirement that they live in Justicia y Paz settlements for "security reasons." There are currently 23 communities in the Uraba region, nine of which have declared themselves "peace communities." Still, a significant number of Cacarica residents remain displaced, the majority in Turbo, located on the Gulf of Uraba in Antioquia Department.

17th Brigade on San Jose and Cacarica

3. (C) 17th Brigade Commander Brigadier General Fandino told Emboffs that on May 8 soldiers from the 17th Brigade captured four members of the 5th Front of the FARC who reportedly have information on the February 21 massacre of eight individuals, which included three members of the peace community of San Jose de Apartado. As of May 12, the four guerrillas were in the custody of the Prosecutor General's Office ("Fiscalia"). Additionally, a minor, also a member of the FARC 5th Front, recently turned himself into the Colombian National Police to enter the reinsertion program. This individual provided the Fiscalia with information on the March 2 grenade attack against the commission investigating the massacre (ref A).

4. (C) BG Fandino discussed with Emboffs the many complaints NGOs in the region file against the Brigade. For example, he said when the military is conducting any sort of operation in the Cacarica area or even just flying overhead, Justicia y Paz will file an international complaint against the Brigade for either attacking civilian communities or for paramilitary collaboration. BG Fandino noted that communities not working with Justicia y Paz are also accused of being paramilitary

bases. He showed Emboffs examples of the more than 30 letters the Brigade receives daily from individuals around the world denouncing the military's alleged activities with paramilitaries in the region. BG Fandino also noted his concern that Justicia y Paz is trying to create "humanitarian zones" to cover all of Choco Department. These zones are areas which have been declared neutral in front of all actors in the conflict and would therefore prevent the entry of state security forces.

15. (C) Regarding the March 31 kidnapping of five members of Justicia y Paz, BG Fandino said his information shows the kidnapping was committed by the FARC for two purposes: (1) to let Justicia y Paz know they (the FARC) felt Justicia y Paz was losing its leadership in the region and (2) to "prove" to the international community that Justicia y Paz and the FARC were not aligned. The five were released unharmed on April 18.

Business Leaders: "Peace Communities are 'Mini-Caguans'"

16. (C) Seven representatives of various local businesses, including banana, wood, palm, and ranching companies, noted to Emboffs the importance of the Uraba region for its biodiversity and geographic placement on the Gulf of Uraba with access to two sea coasts. This strategic location, they added, made the region an area of importance for the illegal armed groups and led to paramilitary and guerrilla groups vying for its control. Business leaders noted that they have often been accused by the FARC of supporting paramilitaries and killing their workers, and as a result, in the 1990s, the FARC murdered 187 banana company owners and managers. However, security has improved and the banana industry is currently employing individuals from 20,000 families. Representatives agreed there were great possibilities for the cultivation of African palm in the region, which has been a heated topic of debate for various NGOs in Colombia.

17. (C) On the issue of peace communities, several representatives referred to them as "mini-Caguans", alluding to the demilitarized zone the Pastrana government gave the FARC during their failed peace negotiations. They also agreed that San Jose de Apartado is a rest and recuperation spot for the FARC, not a "peace community." One businessman said that peace communities were created to form a strategic corridor from the Gulf of Uraba to San Jose de Apartado to allow the FARC to travel and transport contraband freely. One representative told Emboffs of his own experience in the "Punta de Piedra" peace community, located on the Gulf of Uraba, from 1993-1994. He said the community was formed with the assistance of Justicia y Paz, who took control over all matters related to the community, including entry and exit and denied entry to GOC authorities.

IDPs: "NGOs Not Helping Us"

18. (C) Emboffs then met with roughly 60 internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in poor conditions in Turbo. There are roughly 9,000 IDPs in the Turbo area, many of whom were displaced from Cacarica in 1997 and are awaiting the right conditions to return. The legal representative of the Cacarica communities referred to the peace communities as "a state within a state," noting their refusal to allow government authorities to enter. He also stated that the funding that has been given to Justicia y Paz by international donors and other organizations to help the communities and the displaced is not reaching the people. He said the communities have received nothing: houses are in shambles, there is no running water, no bathroom facilities, no medical facilities and no school supplies. He added that children of community members are being conscripted into illegal armed groups and prostitution is on the rise. He said the communities need the assistance of the GOC, not only to facilitate their returns but to improve their living conditions.

19. (C) IDPs alleged that Justicia y Paz is letting the FARC pass through their "peace communities" and that they and other NGOs in the area are doing the political work of the FARC. When Assistant Army Attache noted that some NGOs claim there are high levels of military/paramilitary collaboration and no FARC in the region, there was laughter among nearly all of the 60 persons in the crowd. They said community members are not allowed to move freely and expressed concern about their security when they do return. A representative of the Afro-Colombian communities of Rio Sucio noted that members of the Cacarica communities have filed complaints with the Fiscalia against Justicia y Paz and related NGO CAVIDA (Community of Self-Determination, Life and Dignity) for various reasons, including allowing the FARC to transit through the communities and not respecting their land rights. One individual noted that while Justicia y Paz regularly denounces the military, often for false reasons, they have

never denounced the crimes, including murder, that the FARC has committed against members of their communities. One community leader told Emboffs that because he was late to a required weekly meeting with Justicia y Paz (he was buying milk for his family), he was sanctioned and his family did not receive any food for that week. Community members also alleged that Justicia y Paz is buying land in the region, in contradiction of Law 70 which gave land rights to the Afro-Colombian communities. For example, in the community of Nueva Vida, a sign with a German flag appeared in April 2004 which said "private property."

10. (C) During the middle of the meeting, the group became very quiet and some individuals left the room. It was later explained to Emboffs that a man who residents identified as a FARC militia member ("miliciano") was walking around the meeting site, noting who was in the meeting and what was being said. He remained in the area at least until Emboffs left the site.

Phone Call Received

11. (C) At 0830 on May 13, Human Rights Officer received a call on her cellphone from a representative of a U.S. based religious organization who asked for her by name. This person said she was calling to express her concern that false allegations were being made against Justicia y Paz. Poloff noted she was in Turbo and the NGO representative answered that she had "heard" someone from the Embassy was in the region with the 17th Brigade. Information on Poloff's whereabouts were most likely passed to various organizations by the unknown "miliciano."

Boca de Limon

12. (C) Prior to visiting one of the Cacarica communities, Emboffs spoke with Juan Quinto, a leader of the Boca de Limon community. Quinto's community recently decided they no longer wanted to be a peace community. He said the community had never agreed to be a "peace community" when it accepted the assistance of Justicia y Paz, rather the decision was made for them. Quinto added that the aid given to Justicia y Paz, including assistance from the British organization Oxfam, to improve the living conditions of the community never made it to the people. He said Justicia y Paz regulated access to the community, did not allow residents to easily leave, and did not permit the entry of state security forces. Quinto noted that he had not personally seen Justicia y Paz representatives meet with the FARC, but had heard the allegations.

13. (C) Quinto said since the decision was made not to be a peace community, Justicia y Paz does not allow the residents to use the school they (Justicia y Paz) had built. Therefore, the school, which has desks and blackboards, sits unused, while the 76 school age children in the community make do with a rundown building, no desks and no chairs. Quinto also told Emboffs that Justicia y Paz has a motorboat which they do not allow residents to use even when needed for emergency purposes.

Visit to Las Balsas Community

14. (C) Embassy officials, accompanied by BG Fandino and with air transport and security provided by the Colombian Armed Forces, traveled via helicopter to Las Balsas. Las Balsas is a community that rejected the assistance of Justicia y Paz and refused to become a peace community when they returned to the region in 1998. The community has just started working with Colombian banana company, Multi Fruit, which is currently employing 80 individuals with plans to expand. Balsas is located in a flat, open area (no jungle) allowing environmentally friendly planting. Once at capacity, Multi Fruit will engage in 50/50 profit sharing with the community. The company is also working on improving the health center for the community and providing medical services to its employees and their families. The community has a school, although they are still waiting for the state assigned teacher, and the houses are well-kept with bathrooms and running water. Community members told Emboffs that security has improved in the region and that they are in frequent contact with the 17th Brigade. Residents and company members did note however, that they are often accused of supporting paramilitaries because they are working with a private company and have good relations with the military.

15. (C) Residents who participated in the meeting) roughly 100) agreed NGOs have done nothing positive for communities in the region and stated that is why Balsas has rejected their presence. One individual compared Balsas to Nueva

Vida, a nearby community, which is assisted by Justicia y Paz and has nothing to show for it. Residents agreed they are happy with their community, their jobs and are optimistic about the future. One woman did express concern that Justicia y Paz would come and try to take over their community. BG Fandino replied that the State was there to protect them. He then read an example of the several letters the Brigade receives about paramilitary presence and military collaboration in the area. Residents agreed that there is not a strong paramilitary presence in the area, although one exists, and that they have not seen evidence of military-paramilitary collusion. They added that the FARC is only 30 km from their community, but they are confident in the State's ability to protect them. BG Fandino asked that residents report the whereabouts of both FARC and AUC, noting they are equally illegal. Additionally, Multi Fruit is working on improving the communication abilities of the community, by adding phone lines and radios, with the Brigade and local police.

Latest Info on Police Presence in San Jose de Apartado

16. (U) Police Lieutenant Colonel Clavijo reported to Emboffs that the police presence in San Jose continues to go well and the number of families in San Jose has risen from two when they arrived on April 2 to 45 as of May 12 and more continue to return. The Police, who have been trained in community policing and human rights, are working with the community in several ways including assisting with improvements to the hospital and school.
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